

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: October 10, 2013

Agenda Item: Garrity Mountain Wildlife Management Area Addition

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Preliminary Approval

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

FWP proposes fee-title acquisition of about 640 acres—contingent on negotiations and a current survey—adjoining the Garrity Mountain WMA. This purchase would protect heavily used elk winter range and critical calving habitat, conserve extensive aspen stands, riparian areas, and intermountain grasslands, and associated species, and provide significant public access all within sight of Anaconda. Almost half of the property is composed of aspen stands or riparian habitats that are especially valuable for resident and transitory wildlife. The mix of native grasslands, aspen groves, riparian habitat, and ponds make the property an especially valuable site for a variety of wildlife. The purchase would conserve native habitats targeted for conservation in both FWP's Comprehensive Fish & Wildlife Conservation Strategy (2006) and Natural Resource Damage Programs' Final Upper Clark Fork River Basin Aquatic and Terrestrial Resources Restoration Plans (2012).

This purchase would enhance FWP's ability to manage the WMA and would ensure the WMA retains its integrity by precluding subdivision of this adjoining parcel. The proposal would also provide abundant recreational opportunities. The Conservation Fund and its cooperator American Lands have provided considerable assistance in establishing this project. Potential funding sources would be NRDP and Habitat Montana with the possibility of a contribution by the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation.

Public Involvement Process & Results

If approved to proceed—and successful negotiation occurs with the current owner—FWP would release a draft environmental assessment, management plan, and socioeconomic assessment for public review, and hold a public meeting in Anaconda, prior to presenting a decision notice to the Commission for final approval.

Alternatives and Analysis

With Commission endorsement, FWP would explore alternatives to fee-title purchase and obtain public comment. Given the land's proximity to Anaconda, a no-action alternative would likely result in the conservation values of the property being compromised by subdivision, and public access to the parcel would be lost. This would negatively impact functions of Garrity WMA.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends endorsement by the Commission to negotiate purchase of the Garrity WMA addition, initiate the public involvement process, and work with the NRDP and other potential cooperators to secure funding.

Proposed Motion

I move that the Commission give preliminary approval for FWP to initiate work on the purchase of this addition to Garrity Mountain WMA and to conduct associated public review and analysis.